



DEATH AND SERVICE NEWSLETTER

The year is disappearing quickly, and with the passing of the Summer Solstice, the nights will start drawing in.

This month I had the opportunity to explore the north east part of Scotland, holidaying in Caithness. I also popped over the water to Orkney, and absolutely wish I could have spent more time on the island. Naturally, I visited a few cemeteries and graveyards in the area, and you can learn more about them in the in the coming pages.

From the north to the south, and this month's featured grave comes is from Jersey.

Closer to home, I attended one of the CWGC tours during War Graves Week, and have included some photos from the morning later in the issue. The event was well curated, and shed light on some of the key First and Second World War graves from the Clevedon area.

Until next time.

Richard

ISSUE 38: JULY 2026

Keep in touch:

Website:

<https://deathandservice.co.uk/>

Facebook: [@deathandservice](#)

Instagram: [@deathandservice](#)

YouTube: [@deathandservice](#)

Email:

deathandservice@outlook.com

Death and Service:
Volumes 1-3 are available in
paperback and eBook.



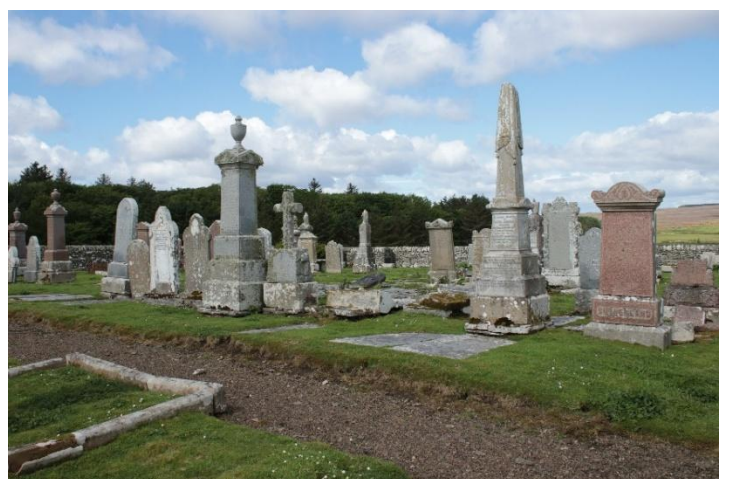
ALL POINTS OF THE COMPASS

I have recently been away, spending a week on the north coast of Scotland, and visiting the Orkneys. Unsurprisingly, I stopped off at a number of graveyards on the trip, and came away with photographs of more than 60 graves that I will be researching in the weeks and months to come.

Caithness is a pretty barren part of the country, but even in its isolation, there are some beautiful, and beautifully remote, churches and graveyards. The fact that the communities were smaller and more spread out did not mean that the memorials of their loved ones were any less important, and the burial grounds are beautifully maintained, showing off the architectural nature of the Victorian memorials.

Amongst its towering obelisks, Thurso Cemetery (below) includes the memorial of baker and amateur botanist, geologist and naturalist Robert Dick. He spent his life collecting and recording fossils, flowers and mosses, sharing his findings with contemporaries and building up a significant collection of samples. Dick's bakery business suffered stiff competition from others in the town and, in March 1863, he faced ruin after a consignment of flour was lost when the ship transporting it was lost. Left owing a significant amount of money, he had no other option than to sell off his beloved fossil collection.

Dick died in virtual obscurity in 1866, and it was only when a local newspaper declared its outrage that the naturalist was not being recognised that the Thurso community pulled together and paid for a memorial, now the tallest obelisk by far in the town's cemetery.



Thrumster Cemetery, south of Wick, is about as remote a burial ground as you are likely to find. Though it was consecrated to serve the nearby village and church, it lies some distance away, isolated amid rolling fields and open countryside. I visited on a clear spring morning, when the long grass swayed softly in the breeze and rabbits darted through the cover it provided. It is hard not to wonder what this solitary place must feel like in the heart of a British winter.

Despite its remoteness, the cemetery is still meticulously maintained. The memorials are beautifully clean, with the grass neatly trimmed. While not on the same scale as the larger cemeteries in towns like Thurso and Wick, it is clear to see that those who are buried in Thrumster are still honoured with due respect and reverence.

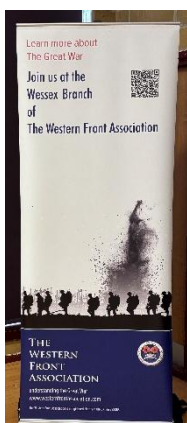


The time I spent exploring the churchyards of Caithness and Orkney got me to thinking about the other graves I have researched across the British Isles. It is fair to say that the graveyard of St Magnus' Cathedral in Kirkwall (right), is the furthest north that I have explored.

The vast majority of the graves I have researched are in England, while trips around the UK have meant that the Death and Service website also includes entries for 44 burials in Wales, 21 in the Channel Islands and 10 in Northern Ireland.

Of the English graves, half are in Somerset – not surprising, given the original theme of the project – while 400 are in Kent. Most of these are in the Woodlands Cemetery, Gillingham, which has more than 1000 military burials from both world wars.

As I start researching the Scottish graves, I thought it apt to look at the graves from across the country, and so, over the coming editions, the Grave of the Month will be from all four points of the compass, starting with the most southerly burial I have researched so far, and so this month's featured grave lies in Jersey.



The Wessex branch of the Western Front Association meets at Pimperne Village Hall (DT11 8UZ) on the first Saturday of every month.

With a diverse range of speakers, they ensure that new visitors are guaranteed a friendly atmosphere and a warm welcome.

For more information on upcoming events, visit their branch page [here](#).

Did you know?

Imperial War Graves Commission headstones were offered to the families free of charge. If they wanted an additional inscription, this would cost 3½d (approx. 86p in today's money) per letter. The payments were rarely chased up by the British Army and, in the end, the IWGC dropped the cost altogether.

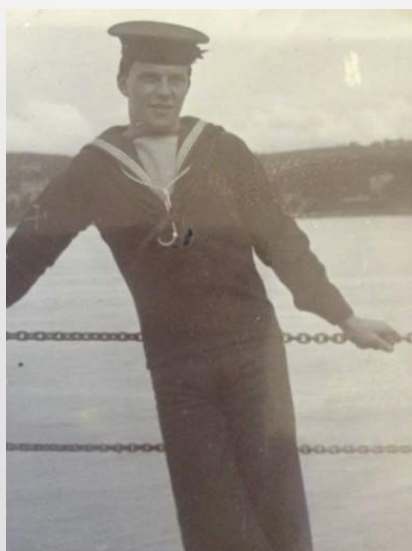
The Australian and Canadian armies did not charge for any inscriptions added to headstones, as they recognised that this would disadvantage poor families. The New Zealand army did not invite families to add inscriptions at all.

GRAVE OF THE MONTH



Grave Location:

St Clement's Church
La Gd Rte de Saint-Clément
Jersey
JE2 6SN



Name: Durell, Laurence

Rank: Shipwright 2nd Class

Regiment: Royal Navy

Date of death: 15th July 1918

Age at time of death: 23

Cause of death: Pneumonia

Laurence Edward Horsnell la Vavasour dit Durell was born on 24th December 1894, one of seven children to Edward and Julia. Edward was born in Jersey, in the Channel Islands, but he and Julia were living in Camberwell, Surrey, when Laurence was born.

The census records from the time show a family who came to be divided. In 1901, Edward was working as an artificial limb maker, while Julia looked after their son and the house the family shared at 14 Kerfield Crescent.

By 1911, things had changed significantly. Edward was now employed as a grocer's storeman, and he and Laurence - apprenticed to a carpenter - were living with his parents, Edward and Sarah, at their home in St Clement, Jersey. Julia, meanwhile, was still on the mainland, where she was employed as a housekeeper for Frederick Manford, a 31-year-old cinema attendant in Hastings. Laurence's younger sister, Phyllis, was also living there.

Laurence seemed keen to carve out a career for himself and, on 3rd January 1913, he enlisted in the Royal Navy as a Ship's Carpenter. His service records show that he was 5ft 8ins (1.72m) tall, with dark hair, blue eyes and a fresh complexion. He was first sent to HMS Victory, the Royal Naval Dockyard in Portsmouth, Hampshire, for his training.

Over the next five years, Ship's Carpenter Durell served on six ships, and as war broke out in the summer of 1914, his role became more and more vital. In May 1917, while serving on board the cruiser HMS Castor, he was promoted to the rank of Shipwright 2nd Class.

During the summer of 1918, Laurence contracted pneumonia. He was transferred to the hospital ship Soudan, but the condition was to prove too severe. He passed away on 15th July 1918, at the age of 23 years of age.

Laurence Edward Horsnell la Vavasour dit Durell was taken back to Jersey for burial. He was laid to rest a family plot in St Clement Churchyard, not far from where his relatives still lived.



CWGC TOUR OF CLEVEDON

War Graves Week kicked off a summer of cemetery tours across the country, with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission running a series of strolls around some of the burial grounds it looks after.

At St Andrew's Church, Clevedon, and the neighbouring cemetery, volunteer Tim Finch took us through some of the more poignant stories from both World Wars. He also highlighted the role the CWGC's volunteers play in maintaining the burial plots, nurturing them for future generations.

Of the WW2 graves, perhaps the most interesting story was that of Private William Wraith, of the East Yorkshire Regiment: the only direct fatality due to enemy action in Clevedon during the war. He was sheltering in the doorway of the Curzon Cinema during an air raid on 4th January 1941, when he was fatally wounded by a bomb. If he'd not stopped off to light a cigarette before heading to the shelter...



UPCOMING EVENTS (CLICK ON THE POSTER TO LEARN MORE)



Thursday 22nd October 2026 7:30pm

Death and Service:

The Commonwealth War Graves of Somerset

There are more than 800 First World War graves in over 240 cemeteries and churchyards across Somerset.

Each of the names on those gravestones has a story connected to it, a story of family and of tragedy, a story of life on the battlefield and of love on the home front.

The *Death and Service* series of books aim to shed light on the servicemen and women behind the names on these headstones, to bring the long-forgotten names to life again, more than a century after they were lost.

Wellington Museum & Local History Society,
Wellington Prep School TA21 8NT

Tuesday 3rd November 2026 7:30pm

Death and Service:

The Commonwealth War Graves of Somerset

There are more than 800 First World War graves in over 240 cemeteries and churchyards across Somerset.

Each of the names on those gravestones has a story connected to it, a story of family and of tragedy, a story of life on the battlefield and of love on the home front.

The *Death and Service* series of books aim to shed light on the servicemen and women behind the names on these headstones, to bring the long-forgotten names to life again, more than a century after they were lost.

Radstock Museum, Chilcompton Village Hall BA3 4EX

Tuesday 17th November 2026 7:30pm

Death and Service:

The Commonwealth War Graves of Somerset

There are more than 800 First World War graves in over 240 cemeteries and churchyards across Somerset.

Each of the names on those gravestones has a story connected to it, a story of family and of tragedy, a story of life on the battlefield and of love on the home front.

The *Death and Service* series of books aim to shed light on the servicemen and women behind the names on these headstones, to bring the long-forgotten names to life again, more than a century after they were lost.

Evercreech History Society,
Evercreech Village Hall BA4 6JP